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SUBJECT: NURISTAN,S NEW PROVINCIAL COUNCIL: MURKY POLITICS,
HARD WORK AHEAD

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Director Hoyt Yee
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The nine Provincial Council members who may be elected in Nuristan Province when results are certified by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) are a clean sweep: neither of the two competing incumbents would return to office. Islamic scholars who support Salafist Governor Jamaluddin Badr were the top vote-getters in a poll badly tainted by fraud. This new bloc on the provincial council may be part of a larger bid by Jamaluddin to stack supporters in government jobs. For the incoming council, worsening security and changing U.S. strategies are pressing problems, while a weak electoral mandate, ambiguous institutional role, lack of funding, and the gap between traditional and formal governance are systemic challenges. The new council and the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) are grappling now with terms of partnership to address these issues. End Summary.

Part of Jamaluddin,s Team?

¶2. (C) In the run-up to the August 20 election, a smattering of Nuristanis claimed that Governor Jamaluddin was scheming to manipulate the vote to pack the Provincial Council with supporters of his Salafist Ummiat-e-Muslimeen movement. Indeed, new members Hafiz Abdul Qyoom (with 14.1 percent of the vote), Abdul Latif (14.2 percent), and Abdul Razaq Madani (6.7 percent) are known political allies of Jamaluddin. Each, like Jamaluddin, is an Islamic scholar. Qyoom heads Nuristan,s ulema (Islamic scholar) council; Abdul Latif studied sharia (Islamic) law in Jalalabad; Abdul Razaq is a Jamaluddin classmate from Medina Islamic University in Saudi Arabia. Einaytullah Mazhabiyar (11.2 percent) is known as non-partisan, but shares with the governor a background in conservative Islam, having served as a sharia law judge after attending a conservative religious school in Pakistan. It is unlikely that any of the listed vote totals for these supporters are accurate though, as numerous credible reports indicate that fraud in Nuristan,s Provincial Council election was among the worst in the nation.

¶3. (C) This group of Jamaluddin supporters is likely to face little organized opposition. Jamiat-e-Islami is the other political movement that gained seats on the provincial council, with representatives Abdul Gafur (11.2 percent), a teacher, and Amir Hamza (6.5 percent), a former mujahideen fighter lacking formal education. The remaining three members are political novices who owe their seats to the vagaries of the electoral system. Shahla, an unknown high school graduate aged 24, pulled only 814 votes, or 1.3 percent. Roweeda won one of two seats reserved for women with 343 votes (0.6 percent), and has only a primary education; the other female representative, Khatera Aimar, won 323 votes (0.5 percent) and has a middle-school diploma.

¶4. (C) Other signs suggest the governor's new bloc on the provincial council is part of a larger bid to fill as many government jobs as possible with personal supporters. A district police chief in western Nuristan last month told us that Jamaluddin recently added 200 of his own men to the police rolls, and is working to push other officers off in order to meet the salary ceiling. The district governor of Dow Ab said he believed Jamaluddin hoped to replace him with an ally who would not criticize the governor's reported corrupt practices, and to fill the vacant Nurgram district governor position with a relative. Already in Nurgram the governor exceeded his authority and fired the Ministry of Education's district representative to make room for a supporter, according to United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) political officers.

A Full Plate of Problems

¶5. (C) Six members of the probable 2009 provincial council in October sought out the civilian and military leadership of the PRT to discuss their hopes for development and concerns about security and the changing Coalition Forces posture in the province. The summer fighting in Barg-e-Matal and Kamdesh district, along with the planned closure of U.S. bases along Nuristan's southern border, alarmed the new Council members. Abdul Latif reported that ~~&Taliban~~8 kidnapped him and held him overnight as he traveled from his home in Wama district to Nurgram to meet the PRT. ~~&If you (Coalition Forces and the USG) turn your back on Nuristan, the enemy will only grow in strength,~~8 Abdul Latif argued.

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After a wide-ranging debate, the Provincial Council members agreed to meet with the PRT again to identify communities that are cooperating with the government and Coalition Forces, and thus ready for development projects.

¶6. (C) Comment: Like many other Provincial Councils, Nuristan's new body has a weak electoral mandate, a loosely-defined role in representing popular concerns, and no budget for staff or operations. The new members have yet to meet formally with the governor or with provincial directors of key ministries, including Education and Agriculture. This larger group, which comprises the now-moribund Provincial Development Council (PDC), may meet later this month in Nurgram; travel along the gravel road to the capital Parun will soon be closed off by snow. This first PDC meeting is likely to be a useful gauge of whether the governor's politics of patronage and probable graft create more or less effective Afghan government partners in development for the PRT.

Mussomeli